

Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

Position Statement on Supportive School Settings

Adopted May 7, 2003

The State Board of Education believes that educators and local school board members must demonstrate leadership in seeking ways to continuously improve student achievement and close the achievement gaps. One source of improved student achievement, supported by the most current research, is more personal school settings that are staffed by highly qualified educators. These settings — including classes, programs and schools - are designed to ensure frequent, consistent student-teacher interaction. Such environments allow for greater individual attention and support for every student, thereby ensuring that each student has a strong connection on a regular basis with at least one adult in the building, and that no student "falls through the cracks."

Although the size of a school building and its total enrollment alone do not necessarily determine a corresponding level of academic achievement and student success, several studies indicate that students in smaller and more personal school settings often outperform students in larger schools on most measures of achievement and perform equally to them on others. Of particular interest in terms of our goal of closing the gaps among and within our public schools is research that indicates that smaller, more personal school settings and reduced class size have a mitigating effect on social and economic factors typically associated with poor performance. This is especially true in impoverished rural and urban districts and districts with mixed socioeconomic groups. The real key in this equation is that such settings allow and foster increased individual attention and support for every student. Smaller, more personal school settings are directly correlated with higher attendance rates, lower dropout rates, a safer and more orderly school climate, and greater parental, student and community communication, involvement and satisfaction. While there is some debate about the cost-effectiveness of small schools, one could argue that the investment is worthwhile given these positive results, and that cost-effectiveness should include measures such as student achievement and graduates' contributions to society.

The State Board of Education encourages local school boards and citizens to refer to research findings when planning school facilities. However, communities and districts need not wait for a school construction project to implement the successful components of more individualized schools settings. The Board urges school districts to study the factors that contribute to a school's success and seek creative ways to incorporate those or comparable practices into existing school buildings. These include changing a school's administrative structure to distribute leadership and decision making to smaller units within the school (e.g., house plans, teacher teams, school within a school) and to enhance communication among teachers, administrators, students and parents; reducing class size; and employing effective "personalization" practices (e.g., teacher advisory systems, looping, student teams, mentoring programs.)

Local board of education members, educators and parents must engage in thoughtful discussions and planning activities that will result in creating or modifying school environments in ways that will contribute to each student's success and ensure a collective responsibility for individual students. The structure and atmosphere of more personal school settings, as well as approaches to facilitating communication within schools, provide us with several models to study and emulate. These efforts will enable us to meet the needs of more students and families and enhance student achievement.